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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

Pointers on Pickles

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A dialogue between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Morse Salisbury, Radio Service, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC stations, Thursday, August 13, 1936.

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MR. SALISBURY:

Now for another report from the Bureau of Home Economics, I'm turning the microphone over to your friend Ruth Van Deman. What's it going to be today, Ruth? More about broiling beefsteak, or more about buying winter coats?

MISS VAN DEMAN:

No, neither one, Morse. But since that talk about broiling meat the other week and with the price of beef where it is, even cheaper than it was last year at this time, so many requests have come for the leaflet "Cooking beef according to the cut", that the free supply is exhausted. We've ordered a reprint, and we are doing everything we can to rush it. If any of you are wondering why you haven't received Leaflet 17 that you wrote for, this is the reason. We'll send you your copy just as soon as the new supply comes from the press.

Now today I want to pass along to you some answers to questions about making pickles. As usual, when the subject of pickles and jelly is on the docket, I go down and talk with Mrs. Yeatman. She's experimented more with jellies, and pickles, and preserves than anybody I know, and she has her results all neatly filed away in notebooks ready to pull out at a moment's notice.

MR. SALISBURY:

Well, just as a matter of academic interest I'd like to know what are the main principles of pickle making. Or maybe it doesn't have anything so formal as principles.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Oh yes it does. The things to work for in making pickles are flavor, color, and crispness. You want the pickle solution, that is the vinegar and spice, to permeate every fiber of the cucumber, or whatever it is you are pickling. To do this you put your vegetables into the pickling liquid, and let this highly flavored liquid replace the natural juices in the tissues. This exchange of pickling solution for juice has to take place gradually. It takes time to make good pickles. If you put your cucumbers immediately into strong vinegar or a strong sweet pickle, they'll be shriveled and tough -- not tender and succulent as you'd like them. Remember, Morse, this slow passage of liquid through a living tissue is one of the things we used to study about in plant physiology?

(over)

MR. SALISBURY:

Yes, indeed, I remember. Osmosis, that's the technical name for it, I believe. Can't say I ever thought of osmosis in connection with pickles though.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Well, of course, plenty of good pickles have been made by people who never heard of osmosis. But it's interesting, I think, and helpful to have some of the scientific background on these household ways of handling food.

For instance, it helps to know that the brine or the salt you put cucumbers into first merely draws the juices out, and prepares the tissues to absorb better the vinegar or the sweet-sour sirup -- in other words, aids osmosis. The crispest, most satisfactory vegetable pickles are made by the long-brine method. They are allowed to ferment and cure in a heavy brine for 4 to 8 weeks, then freshened to remove the excess salt, before they're put into the vinegar and spice.

MR. SALISBURY:

Is that the way dill pickles are made?

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Yes, that's the way commercial dill pickles are made. But Mrs. Yeatman makes very nice dills by a short-brine method that takes only about 2 weeks. She uses a 5 percent brine that allows the fermentation to speed up.

MR. SALISBURY:

Where does the dill come in? Is that something to do with the process?

MISS VAN DEMAN:

The dill? Oh, dill is just the herb that gives a particular flavor to the pickles. It's a tall branching plant with flat seed heads. It looks something like a parsnip plant that's gone to seed. You can use dill dried or fresh. It's the seeds that have most of the flavor. You simply put a layer of the stems and seeds into the bottom of the pickle jar, then pack in the cucumbers, pour on brine to cover, spread a layer of the dill over the top, cover with a plate and weight it down so the cucumbers will stay under the brine.

MR. SALISBURY:

Is that all there is to making dill pickles?

MISS VAN DEMAN:

No, not quite. You have to keep dill pickles at even temperature (about 70 to 85 degrees), so they'll ferment properly, and you have to remove the scum, or this scum will destroy the lactic acid that develops and the pickles will spoil. And there are some fine points about making the brine, getting the right proportion of salt to water and adding some vinegar to keep down bacteria that cause spoilage. To make good dill pickles, a person needs exact directions. That's why we have a pamphlet on "Homemade pickles and relishes".

MR. SALISBURY:

Yes, I know about that pamphlet. Since you mentioned that pamphlet on "Homemade pickles and relishes" on the Farm and Home Hour some weeks ago, I understand you've had over 2000 requests. I know we Americans are reputed to have a sweet tooth. But I had no idea we had such a yen for pickles. Or at least for homemade pickles.

Well, thank you, Ruth, for this background information on pickles you've given us today.

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